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THESE SOURCES, WHO ASKED TO REMAIN ANONYMOUS, SAID THERE ARE INDICATIONS THE SOVIET NAVY PROBABLY WILL SEND ABOUT FIVE WARSHIPS FROM THE BLACK SEA INTO THE MEDITERRANEAN.

.. IT LOOKS LIKE IT WON'T BE A GREAT NUMBER," SAID ONE SPECIALIST WHO INDICATED THE ANTICIPATED MOVE IS VIEWED AS A DEMONSTRATION OF SOVIET SUPPORT FOR THE ARAB CAUSE RATHER THAN A SERIOUS MILITARY THREAT.

AT A PENTAGON BRIEFING, DEFENSE DEPARTMENT SPOKESMAN HENRY CATTO SAID HE HAD "NO INDICATIONS OF A MOVEMENT OF SOVIET SHIPS INTO THE MEDITERRANEAN." HOWEVER, HE VOLUNTEERED THAT THE SOVIET NAVY HAS A "SURGE CAPABILITY" WHICH WOULD PERMIT THEM TO REINFORCE THEIR MEDITERRANEAN FLEET IN A FAIRLY SHORT TIME.

ACCORDING TO CATTO, THERE ARE NOW 30 SOVIET NAVAL VESSELS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN AND ABOUT THE SAME NUMBER OF AMERICAN NAVY SHIPS.

THE PRESENT SIZE OF THE SOVIET MEDITERRANEAN FLEET IS A LITTLE BELOW THE NORMAL PATTERN OF ABOUT 34 TO 36 VESSELS, INTELLIGENCE SOURCES SAID.

OFFICIALS SAID THEY HAVE DETECTED NO MAJOR ACTIONS INSIDE THE SOVIET UNION WHICH WOULD SUGGEST THAT MOSCOW WAS PREPARING TO HELP THE HARD-PRESSED PALESTINE LIBERATION ORGANIZATION FORCES OR THE SYRIANS, WHO ARE CLOSE ALLIES OF THE SOVIET UNION.

THERE HAS BEEN A NOTICEABLE INCREASE IN CODED RADIO TRAFFIC TO SOME OF THE SEVEN SOVIET AIRBORNE DIVISIONS, SOURCES SAID, BUT THE SOVIETS SO FAR HAVE NOT MOVED ANY PLANES INTO POSITION TO PICK UP ANY AIRBORNE ELEMENTS.

IN THE LATTER STAGES OF THE 1973 ARAB-ISRAELI WAR, A SOVIET ALERT OF ITS AIRBORNE DIVISIONS AND THE MOVEMENT OF TRANSPORT PLANES TO THEIR BASES RANG AN ALARM BELL IN THE UNITED STATES. AT THAT TIME, THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP WAS WARNING THEN-PRESIDENT RICHARD M. NIXON THAT THE SOVIET UNION WAS PREPARED TO INTERVENE TO PREVENT DESTRUCTION OF THE ENCIRCLED EGYPTIAN 3RD ARMY BY ISRAELI FORCES.

IN RESPONSE TO THOSE SOVIET MOVES, NIXON ORDERED A WORLDWIDE ALERT OF AMERICAN ARMED FORCES. THIS LED TO A TENSE FEW DAYS BEFORE THE SITUATION EASED.

ASKED HOW THE NEW SOVIET WARNING DIRECTED AT ISRAEL MONDAY NIGHT WAS REGARDED BY PENTAGON OFFICIALS, CATTO SAID, "I WOULDN'T WANT TO CHARACTERIZE" THE RUSSIAN STATEMENT IN ANY WAY.

NONETHELESS, TO SOME OFFICIALS THE SOVIET WARNING HAD AN OMINOUS TONE IN SAYING THAT DEVELOPMENTS IN LEBANON, WHERE THE ISRAELIS HAVE BOTTLED UP PLO UNITS AND HEMMED IN BEIRUT, "ARE BOUND TO AFFECT THE INTERESTS OF THE USSR."

MEANWHILE, THE SOVIET NAVY WAS REPORTED TO HAVE STATIONED FOUR WARSHIPS OFF TARTUS, SYRIA.

FARTHER SOUTH, TWO SOVIET MISSILE-ARMED GUNBOATS AND AN INTELLIGENCE-GATHERING SHIP WERE SAID TO BE SHADOWING THE U.S. AIRCRAFT CARRIER KENNEDY AND ITS TWO ESCORTING WARSHIPS ABOUT 150 MILES OFF BEIRUT.

A FIVE-SHIP U.S. NAVY AMPHIBIOUS FORCE WITH ABOUT 1,800 MARINES ABOARD WAS REPORTED OFF BEIRUT AS WELL.

THE U.S. GOVERNMENT HAS OFFICIALLY ACKNOWLEDGED THAT U.S. NAVAL VESSELS ARE OFF LEBANON IN CASE THEY ARE NEEDED TO EVACUATE AMERICANS FROM THE WAR AREA.

A SECOND U.S. CARRIER, THE EISENHOWER, IS OPERATING IN THE MEDITERRANEAN TO THE WEST OF THE CRISIS AREA.

TWO ADDITIONAL CARRIERS, THE INDEPENDENCE AND FORRESTAL, ARE ENROUTE TOWARD THE MEDITERRANEAN UNDER ORDERS TO REPLACE THE KENNEDY AND THE EISENHOWER IN WHAT HAS BEEN DESCRIBED AS A NORMAL ROTATION.

HOWEVER, U.S. POLICYMAKERS WOULD HAVE THE OPTION OF KEEPING ALL FOUR CARRIERS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN FOR AWHILE IF THEY FELT SUCH A SHOW OF FORCE WAS NECESSARY. THE INDEPENDENCE AND FORRESTAL ARE DUE TO REACH THE MEDITERRANEAN ABOUT NEXT WEEKEND, OFFICIALS SAID.

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